

# NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

**United States Congress      Massachusetts Seventh District**

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## **REP. MARKEY ON VETERAN'S DAY: LET'S WORK TO HELP OUR HEROES TODAY AND IN FUTURE**

**MEDFORD, MA** – U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey released the following statement today in commemoration of Veterans Day:

“Veterans Day will always be a day of sober reflection on the sacrifices made for freedom by our fighting forces, but especially so when we have tens of thousands of troops in service to our country deployed around the globe in harms way. No group of Americans has stood stronger and braver for our nation than those who have served in the Armed Forces, and now a new generation is joining this elite status through their difficult assignments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Korea and other remote regions of the world that depend on their attention. We celebrate, honor and remember these courageous and faithful men and women.

To honor our national promise to our 25 million veterans, I will continue to fight for the rights of our veterans. We have had some successes, but not enough. Here are the successes we have made and the work, which remains:

End the Widow's Tax, also known as the Survivor Benefits Penalty. Ending this tax is long past due. Spouses have endured much on the home front. Thanks to Democratic efforts, this tax is finally coming to an end.

Invest in veterans' health care. Each year Democrats offer budgets including billions more than Republican budgets for veterans' health care, which veterans' groups say is critically needed to maintain the care of our injured, sick and aging warriors. Right now, thousands of veterans are waiting six months or longer for an appointment at VA hospitals. I believe it is time for veterans' health care funding to become mandatory and end the yearly fighting for decent funding levels. We are also working to expand access to health care for the National Guard and Reserves.

Prevent new increases in the cost of veterans' health care. Every year, Republicans have proposed to increase the cost of health care for veterans. Their budgets have raised health care costs for more than 1 million veterans, increasing drug co-payments and imposing new enrollment fees that will cost veterans over \$2 billion over five years. This will result in driving about 200,000 veterans out of the system, and discourage another 1 million veterans from enrolling. We strongly oppose new fees and increases in prescription drug co-payments.

End the Disabled Veterans' Tax. Republicans have blocked efforts to fully repeal the Disabled Veterans Tax for all veterans, which forces disabled military retirees to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. Instead, they have enacted a plan that takes ten years to phase in benefits and requires two-thirds of military retirees with service-connected disabilities to continue to pay the Disabled Veterans Tax. Democratic efforts to increase family separation and imminent danger pay for men and women in uniform deployed around the world have finally succeeded despite the opposition of some Republicans. Democrats want to provide full payment of both retirement pay and disability compensation to all 500,000 disabled military retirees and want the change to take effect immediately.

Honor our military families. Democrats want to give a \$1,000 bonus for soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, to make military pay increases permanent for those in imminent danger and away from their families, to continue targeted pay raises for enlisted personnel, and to extend the child tax credit to the hundreds of thousands of military families left out of the Republican tax cut because, as service members, they do not earn enough money.

I am particularly pleased with the progress we made here in Massachusetts to keep open the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, MA. Last year on Veterans Day, I joined with the families of Veterans suffering from Alzheimer's Disease who were being treated at the hospital to rally in support of keeping that hospital's Alzheimer's unit intact and at Bedford. The Department of Veterans Affairs CARES (Capital Assessment and Realignment for Enhanced Services) Commission planned to close all inpatient services at the Bedford VA including the nation's only VA residential Alzheimer's unit. We delivered over 13,000 signatures of Massachusetts residents to VA Secretary Principi demanding that the VA keep all inpatient services open at Bedford. In early 2004, the VA finally reversed its original proposal and will keep all services intact at the Bedford VA."

Finally, I have pledged that no future soldier should have to face the financial fate of Lance Corporal James Crosby of Winthrop. I have introduced the Crosby-Puller Wounds Compensation Act to ensure that any member of the armed forces who is wounded or injured in a combat zone will continue to receive the special pays and allowances associated with their service while recovering from their wounds.

The bill has been named after Lance Corporal James Crosby and, at his request, Lt. General "Chesty" Puller, the most decorated Marine in the history of the corps. Lance Corporal James Crosby of Winthrop, MA was wounded by enemy fire in March of 2004 while riding on the back of a military vehicle in Iraq. A piece of shrapnel pierced James' side and penetrated his intestines and spine. He has undergone over 14 surgeries, but remains paralyzed from the waist down. As James was medically evacuated from the combat zone, his special pays and allowances were beginning to be cut. While in the combat zone, James qualified for the Combat Zone Tax Exclusion (CTZE), Imminent Danger Pay (IDP), Hardship Duty Pay (HDP) and Flight Pay. When James returned home to the United States to recuperate from his injuries, he realized that he was losing his combat tax exclusion and other special pays. This bill deals with the immediate financial burden placed on soldiers like James.

James eagerly wants to work to help other members of nation's armed forces that are confronted with the same challenges he faced upon returning from Iraq. We need to help. James is clearly a hero, but heroes need help too."